



## U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

### Religious Freedom in Turkey

#### Panel I



**Andrew Brunson** is an American pastor. Andrew and his wife Norine lived in Turkey for 23 years and were involved in starting churches, conducting trainings, providing aid to refugees, and ministering in a house of prayer. In October 2016, they were falsely accused of terrorism and Andrew was held for two years in Turkish prisons. Due to a worldwide prayer movement and significant political pressure from the US government, he was finally sentenced to time served and dramatically released in October 2018. He holds a PhD from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

#### Panel II



**Mustafa Akyol** is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, where he focuses on the intersection of public policy, Islam, and modernity. A Turkish journalist and author, he is a regular contributing opinion writer for the New York Times since 2013, and has been a regular opinion columnist for Turkish publications such as Hurriyet Daily News, and for the Middle-East focused Al-Monitor.com.

Akyol is the author of *Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty* praised by The Financial Times as “a forthright and elegant Muslim defense of freedom.” Over the past two decades, Akyol’s articles have also appeared in a wide range of other publications and his TED talk on “Faith versus

Tradition in Islam” has been watched by more than a million viewers. He studied political science and history at Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey.



**Lisel Hintz** works at the intersection of identity politics and foreign policy. She is particularly interested in how domestic identity struggles spill over to shape, and be shaped by international affairs. Her regional focus is on Turkey and its relations with Europe and the Middle East.

She has spoken and written widely on Turkey-EU and Turkey-Syria relations (particularly on the refugee crisis), the Kurdish Question, and how what she terms Ottoman Islamism shaped Turkey's aggressive policies abroad as well as its authoritarian turn back home. She teaches courses on psychological approaches to foreign policy decision-making and European social movements.

She received her PhD in Political Science from George Washington University, was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell University's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, and was Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University.



**Aykan Erdemir**, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, is a former member of the Turkish Parliament (2011 to 2015) who served in the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, EU Harmonization Committee, and the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committee on the IT Sector and the Internet. As an outspoken defender of pluralism, minority rights, and religious freedoms in the Middle East, Aykan has been at the forefront of the struggle against religious persecution, hate crimes, and hate speech in Turkey.

He is a founding member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and a drafter of and signatory to the Oslo Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief (2014), as well as a signatory legislator to the London Declaration on Combating Antisemitism.

After completing his BA in International Relations at Bilkent University, Ankara, Aykan received an MA in Middle Eastern Studies and PhD in Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University, where his doctoral dissertation was entitled, “Incorporating Alevis: The Transformation of Governance and Faith-based Collective Action in Turkey.”